

FINAL DECISION RECORD FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NM-060-99-119 FOR ALLOTMENT 65058

On January 28, 2000 the Roswell Field Office (RFO) received a protest of the proposed Decision Record to renew the term grazing lease for Allotment 65058 from Forest Guardians. Upon a review of the protest the RFO determined the protest was timely and with standing. Under the provisions of 43 CFR 4160.2 and 4160.3, the Authorized Officer shall review the proposed decision, in light of the protestant's statement of reasons and other pertinent information, and issue a final decision.

This protest also contained references to issues that are outside the jurisdiction of the RFO. These include reference to the requirements of the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act which the U. S. Forest Service operates under. This is not germane to the allotment in question (65058) and will not be considered.

In summary, the protest claims the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) RFO violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and the fundamentals of rangeland health as outlined in 43 CFR 4180.1. The Protestor asks that BLM discard the proposed decision; begin the process to prepare an environmental impact statement to address permit and lease renewals for this and other allotments; and not permit livestock grazing on this allotment until the process is complete.

Under Section II of the protest, the Protestor made five claims that are broad in scope and lack specificity to this Environmental Analysis and Proposed Decision Record. These include:

1. The protest claims that BLM violated NEPA by not preparing an EIS to determine lands where livestock grazing is suitable. To support this claim, the protest makes several supporting statements. These include:

"Because neither 43 CFR 4110.1-1, nor any existing land use plan dictate whether or how much livestock grazing should be authorized on these lands, [BLM] . . . Must make its own informed and reasoned determination . . ."

[BLM has] "deliberately refused to consider the most important determinant of grazing's impact on the environment: the number of cattle it would permit to graze."

[BLM has] "refused to open to public review and comment its determination of the number of cattle that will be grazing under the one grazing strategy it analyzed and the basis for its conclusion that this determination would have no significant impact on the environment."

"We simply question whether that data takes into consideration the needs of non-livestock values. Thus, the most important decision for the allotments, the number of cows and the season of use, will be made without any real public scrutiny."

After a review of the Environmental Analysis (EA) and the Proposed Decision Record (DR), the BLM RFO offers the following:

43 CFR 4110.1-1 refers to grazing on lands acquired by BLM. This section of the regulations deals with the qualifications for a grazing permit/lease on acquired lands. The allotment in question here does not contain any acquired lands as defined by this section. This is not germane

to this issue.

The statement that no existing land use plan authorizes livestock grazing is in error. The Approved Roswell Resource Management Plan (RMP) (October 1997) carried forward the determination the public lands are suitable for livestock grazing (See page 30 and Appendix 8). Both the East Roswell Environmental Impact Statement (1979) and the West Roswell Management Framework Plan (MFP) (1984) analyzed livestock grazing on the public lands within the RFO and determined that the overall level of livestock grazing is consistent with the resource values. Furthermore, the RMP provides for the level of permitted use within an allotment to be adjusted (either an increase or decrease) based on monitoring data.

The determination that the public lands were suitable for livestock grazing was made in the East Roswell EIS and the West Roswell Management Framework Plan (MFP). Further, the MFP and EIS analyzed the impacts of livestock numbers and the effects of grazing on the public lands; these documents also analyzed a range of alternatives, including the elimination of grazing. Both the earlier documents and the subsequent RMP that replaced it were subject public review and comment. It is a matter of record that the Protestor commented on the Draft RMP and protested the Proposed RMP decisions.

Prior to developing the EAs for the permit/lease renewals, the RFO held five public scoping meetings in July 1998. Between July 1998 and May 1999, RFO periodically published a newsletter that tracked the progress of the permit/lease renewal process and progress on the EA development, and that discussed issues concerning the permit/lease renewals. Copies of this newsletter were sent to the Protestor. The Protestor states that grazing determinations will be made without public scrutiny and this is not born out by the record.

2. The protest claims that BLM violated NEPA by failing to address stocking rates as the most significant factor of impacts on resources. In support of this claim, the protest makes the following supporting statements:

" . . . [the EA] fails to evaluate the most relevant factor of all: the number of cattle to be permitted to graze."

"It is self-evident, however, that the approximate locations and numbers of cattle permitted on the allotments . . . is the most significant factor in determining the environmental effects of grazing."

After a review of the Environmental Analysis (EA) and the Proposed Decision Record (DR), the BLM RFO offers the following:

The EA is specific to the allotment it analyzes and does state the permitted livestock numbers allowed to graze within the allotment. Allotment specific analysis of livestock grazing and permitted livestock numbers show that the location of the livestock is within the allotment boundaries.

The level of permitted use for this allotment (65058) is stated on page 2 of the EA under the Proposed Action and is as follows:

86 AUs year-long for 475 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) at 46% Public Land Active Use and

10 AUs year-long for 53 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) at 46% Public Land Suspended Use

The original determinations of stocking rates and suitability for year-long grazing were made in the East Roswell Grazing EIS and the Roswell MFP Amendment/EIS. The Roswell RMP carried forward those determinations and the EA is tiered off the RMP. This tiering is permitted by NEPA and allows an agency to analyze impacts.

3. The protest claims that BLM's Proposed Decision violates NEPA because the EA failed to analyze a range of reasonable alternatives. To support this claim, the protest makes several supporting statements.

"Having failed to consider alternative stocking rates, which is clearly 'necessary to permit a reasoned choice,' . . . The BLM's proposed decision must be withdrawn and a new analysis issued."

". . . BLM must consider a reasonable range of alternatives, including a no action alternative."

After a review of the Environmental Analysis (EA) and the Proposed Decision Record (DR), the BLM RFO offers the following:

Since grazing suitability has been determined and alternatives have been analyzed in previous land use planning documents to which these EAs are tiered, RFO has already met the requirement of analyzing a range of alternatives necessary to permit a reasoned choice. Further, given the conditions of the allotment in question, RFO contends it has already considered a reasonable range of alternatives in the EA, based on the existing conditions, issues and conflicts within this allotment. It is not necessary to consider reducing the permitted number of livestock if the reduction is not germane to existing conditions.

The NEPA process does not require voluminous information and time consuming analysis of alternatives that would not be feasible to implement. NEPA requires that a range of reasonable alternatives be considered. The elimination of grazing was considered as an alternative. The fact that livestock grazing already has been shown to be an appropriate use of the public lands coupled with the economic, social and resource management effects narrows the need of detailed analysis of alternatives presented in the EA.

4. The protest claims that BLM violates NEPA when it did not prepare an EIS for significant and connected actions. To support this claim, the protest makes this statement:

"The EIS must evaluate the actual environmental effects of particular grazing permits in specific areas . . . and must include the detailed analysis of local geographic conditions necessary for the decision maker to determine what course of action is appropriate under circumstances."

After a review of the Environmental Analysis (EA) and the Proposed Decision Record (DR), the BLM RFO offers the following:

In addition to the responses to the previous claims, NEPA allows for the development of an EA analyzing the impacts resulting from the proposed action. With a finding of no significant impacts, preparing an EIS is not necessary. The protest presents no facts or evidence that this finding is in error. The protest does not support this claim.

5. The protest claims that the cumulative impact analysis is inadequate. To support this claim the protest makes these statements:

"It [BLM] must analyze the cumulative effects of 100 years or more of livestock grazing on the

allotment and other allotments for which NEPA analysis is concurrently conducted.”

“BLM does not *even* [emphasis added] provide a cursory discussion of the cumulative impacts of the action on riparian systems, it does not *even* [emphasis added] mention the cumulative effects of livestock grazing on riparian habitat. Even if cumulative effects are difficult to assess they can not be dismissed.”

After a review of the Environmental Analysis (EA) and the Proposed Decision Record (DR), the BLM RFO offers the following:

In this case the cumulative impact section of the EA has been revised. The EA acknowledges livestock grazing has occurred on this and other allotments during the past century, and attempts to describe the same impacts on the surrounding allotments. See page 9 of the EA for reference and discussion of the cumulative impacts resulting from this proposed action.

Here again, the protest fails to be specific. There are general statements, strung together without specific comments on the substance of the EA.

Under Section III, the protest claims RFO fails to analyze a no grazing alternative as well as a range of alternatives with varying stocking rates and, therefore, BLM violates FLPMA by failing to choose a level of grazing that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people.

To support this claim, the protest states:

“ . . the BLM must consider that there are hundreds of millions of acres of both private and public lands in the nation that provide better forage for cattle than do the arid and rolling hills. But resources on BLM lands such as habitat for desert bighorn, elk, deer, and antelope, and the cottonwood-willow forests and its many threatened, endangered species are incredibly scarce.”

“There is no question that livestock grazing has permanently degraded the productivity of our riparian zones, native fisheries, grasslands and forests. The proposed decisions to approve the permits in question fail to recognize this prohibition and will continue to impair the long-term productivity of riparian areas.”

After a review of the Environmental Analysis (EA) and the Proposed Decision Record (DR), the BLM RFO offers the following:

FLPMA requires BLM to protect resources on public lands while simultaneously making some of those resources available for use. RFO has attempted to strike that balance required by FLPMA by fulfilling the requirements of NEPA. Other than the general statements cited here, the protest presents no evidence or data that RFO is in error.

In regards to Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species, RFO has consulted with the US Fish & Wildlife Service, resulting in a no jeopardy opinion on the RMP (See the Biological Opinion of the Roswell RMP (Cons. #2-22-96-F-102, May 1997); letter from USFWS to RFO, dated April 1998). In the case of the current permit/lease renewal process, allotments were grouped by community type (i.e. Grassland, Mixed Desert Shrub, Shinnery Oak Dune, Pinon-Juniper or Riparian) for consultation with the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

V. The protest claims that the fundamentals of rangeland health have been violated.

The protest asserts:

"We also believe the [proposed] decisions fails to comply with the fundamentals of rangeland health . . . because of the poor condition of the riparian habitat and the decision to allocate 99% of the forage to cattle, thereby causing harm to the state endangered desert bighorn, we believe the decision violates to the fundamentals of rangeland health."

After a review of the Environmental Analysis (EA) and the Proposed Decision Record (DR), the BLM RFO offers the following:

The protest does not offer any data or other information (other than belief) that could lead RFO to re-examine the documents for violations of the fundamentals of rangeland health.

Desert bighorn does not habituate the allotments within RFO boundaries and, therefore, the reference to the species is irrelevant. The monitoring and allotment evaluation methodologies and procedures used by the RFO preclude the allocation of forage in excess of 45 percent of the available forage to livestock grazing. Therefore the claim that the RFO allocates 99 percent of the forage to livestock is in error.

The protest does not define poor condition in the light of the data presented in the EA. Similarly, the protest does not define adequate protection. Neither does the protest provide data nor specific information that would lead RFO to conclude it had erred in some manner.

After an extensive review of the protest and the EA analyzing the impacts of renewing the term grazing permit/lease, the RFO concludes the protest from the Protestor does not show that the RFO erred in the preparation of the EA, either in process of public involvement or the analyses of the impacts. Therefore the Final Decision in this matter is to:

Offer a ten-year livestock grazing lease for public lands on Allotment 65058 to Slash G Cattle Co. as described in the Proposed Action of Environmental Assessment NM-060-99-119 (EA). Permitted use will be as follows:

86 AUs year-long for 475 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) at 46% Public Land Active Use and
10 AUs year-long for 53 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) at 46% Public Land Suspended Use

An AU is equivalent to 1 cow. The term of the offered lease is from May 1, 2000 to February 28, 2005.

Through the Rangeland Reform '94 initiative, the BLM developed new regulations for grazing administration on public lands. With public involvement, fundamentals of rangeland health were established and written into the new regulations. The fundamentals of rangeland health are identified in 43 CFR §4180.1, and pertain to (1) watershed function; (2) ecological processes; (3) water quality; and (4) habitat for threatened, endangered, and other special status species. Based on available data and professional judgement presented in the EA, the fundamentals of rangeland health exist on Allotment 65058.

Pursuant to the provisions of 43 CFR 4.21, 4.470 and 4.160.4 you are allowed 30 days from the receipt of

this Final Decision in which to file an appeal to the Field Office Manager for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge. Your appeal must state clearly and concisely in writing the reason(s) why you think the final decision is in error.

To receive consideration for staying the implementation of this decision, you must specify how you would be harmed if the stay were not granted. If a petition for stay is not granted the decision will be put into effect following the 30 appeal period. Appeals can be filed at the following address:

Field Office Manager
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
2909 West Second Street
Roswell, NM 88201

Signed by Edwin L. Roberson
Field Manager

3/8/2000
Date

Environmental Assessment for Grazing Authorization
Allotment #65058
EA# NM-060-99-119

Roswell Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
2909 West 2nd
Roswell, NM 88201

T11S R26E, T11S R27E various sections

I. Introduction

When authorizing livestock grazing on public range, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has historically relied on a land use plan and environmental impact statement to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A recent decision by the Interior Board of Land Appeals, however, affirmed that the BLM must conduct a site-specific NEPA analysis before issuing a permit or lease to authorize livestock grazing. This environmental assessment fulfills the NEPA requirement by providing the necessary site-specific analysis of the effects of issuing a new grazing permit on allotment #65058.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of issuing a new grazing permit would be to authorize livestock grazing on public range on this allotment. The permit would specify the types and levels of use authorized, and the terms and conditions of the authorization pursuant to 43 CFR §§4130.3, 4130.3-1, and 4130.3-2.

B. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (October 1997) has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan's Record of Decision as required by 43 CFR 1610.5-3. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action and alternative is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (CWA)(33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) as amended; the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.); Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management and Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands.

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action (BLM preferred):

The proposed action is to authorize to Slash G Cattle Company a grazing permit on allotment # 65058 for 96 Animal Units (AU's) at 46% federal range. This equates to 528 Animal Unit Months (AUM's). Of the 96 AU's, 86 of them will be active and 10 AU's suspended. Grazing will be authorized from March 1 thru the last day of February of each year. The class of livestock is cattle. There are no projects planned on federal land for this allotment at this time. Any subsequent management activities will have a site specific analysis conducted at that time.

B. No Permit authorization alternative:

This alternative would be not to issue a new grazing permit. There would be no livestock grazing authorized on public land. The No Grazing alternative was considered, but not chosen in the Rangeland Reform Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Record of Decision (ROD) (p. 28). The elimination of grazing in the Roswell Field Office Area was considered but eliminated by the Roswell RMP/ROD (pp. ROD-2).

C. Activate the 10 AU's of suspended use:

This alternative would activate 10 AU's which are currently in suspension. Since range conditions are currently static, it was deemed that this alternative was not feasible at this time. There will be no further discussion of this alternative.

III. Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Allotment #65058 is located in Chaves county, about 10 miles east of Roswell. The allotment consists of 5 pastures and 1 trap. This allotment contains 5,155 acres of which 2,805 acres are Federal land. The allottee has permits on two adjacent allotments and runs all three in conjunction.

This allotment is located within the Grassland vegetative community as identified within the Roswell RMP. The distinguishing feature for the grassland community is that grass species typically comprises 75% or more of the potential plant community. Short-grass, mid-grass, and tall-grass species may be found within this community. The community also includes shrub, half-shrub, and forb species. The percentages of grasses, forbs, and shrubs actually found at a particular location will vary with recent weather factors and past resource uses.

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected: Prime/Unique Farmland, ACEC's, Minority/Low Income Populations, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous/Solid Wastes, Floodplains, Invasive Non-Native Species, Native American Religious Concerns. Cultural inventory surveys would continue to be required for federal actions involving surface disturbing activities. The impact of the proposed action and alternatives to minority or low-income populations or communities has been considered and no significant impact is anticipated.

B. Affected Resources

1. Soils: The soils present within this allotment belong to the Holloman-Gypsum land-Reeves general mapping unit. These soils vary from shallow over gypsum to gypsum land to deep, nearly level loams. For more information, refer to Soil Survey of Chaves County New Mexico, Southern Part. There is a certain amount of erosion that occurs naturally in this vegetation community. High winds in the spring and high intensity thunderstorms are the primary agents of soil transportation.

2. Vegetation: This allotment is within the grassland vegetative community as identified in the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community.

The dominant ecological (range) site on the allotment is Loamy SD-3. Range site descriptions are available for review at the Roswell BLM office or any Natural Resources Conservation Service office. There are 3 vegetative monitoring studies on this allotment. Monitoring evaluations have been completed in 1981, 1985, 1990 and 1995. Analysis of the monitoring data indicates condition is good and range trend is static. There is sufficient forage to meet multiple use

requirements and for the number of AUs which have been permitted in the past. The percent bare ground and rock found on the allotment fall within the parameters established by the RMP/EIS for this vegetative community. Copies of the monitoring data and the analysis of the data are available at the Roswell Field Office.

The following table summarizes monitoring data for the allotment:

Monitoring Data Summary, Allotment Averages							
	Grasses	Forbs	Shrubs	Trees	Litter	Bare Ground	Rocks
Percent composition of vegetative cover	95.80	1.42	2.78	0.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
Percent Ground Cover	12.99		0.53		28.19	58.28	0.03

3. Wildlife: Game species occurring within the area include mule deer, antelope, mourning dove, and scaled quail. Raptors that utilize the area on a more seasonal basis include the swainson's, red-tailed, and ferruginous hawks, American kestrel, and great-horned owl. Numerous passerine birds utilize the grassland areas due to the variety of grasses, forbs, and shrubs. The most common include the western meadowlark, mockingbird, horned lark, killdeer, loggerhead shrike, and vesper sparrow.

The warm prairie environment supports a large number of reptile species compared to higher elevations. The more common reptiles include the short-horned lizard, lesser earless lizard, eastern fence lizard, coachwhip, bullsnake, prairie rattlesnake, and western rattlesnake.

A general description of wildlife occupying or potentially utilizing the proposed action area and associated Habitat Management Areas refer to the Affected Environment Section (p. 3-62 to 3-71) of the Draft Roswell RMP/EIS (9/1984).

4. Threatened and Endangered Species: There are no known resident populations of threatened or endangered species on the allotment. A list of federal threatened, endangered and candidate species reviewed for this EA can be found in Appendix 11 of the Roswell Approved RMP (AP11-2). There are no known records of these species having occurred on the allotment. A spring in

section 14 and associated area is potential habitat for the federally Endangered Pecos Gambusia. It is also suitable habitat for the following Federal Candidate species: Roswell Spring snail and the Puzzle Sunflower. Recent surveys have been conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the New Mexico Natural Heritage Program and none of the above listed species were recorded. Surveys for these and other species will continue. There will be no further discussion of this resource.

5. Livestock Management: The allotment is grazed by cattle. There are 5 pastures and 1 trap. The latest grazing permit was for 86 AU's active use. This allotment is run in conjunction with two adjacent allotments which are permitted to the allottee. A deferred rotation grazing system is used. As a result, the actual number of livestock on the allotment may exceed the number found on the permit, however, the number of AUM's for the allotment will not be exceeded since the cattle are later rotated off the allotment. In some years actual livestock numbers on the allotment may be less than the active use depending on vegetative and economic conditions.

6. Visual Resources: The allotment is located within a Class IV Visual Resource Management area. This means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terms of scale. However, the changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape.

7. Water Quality: A spring is located on federal land in Sec. 14. The spring source is fenced. Water is available outside of the exclosure for livestock and wildlife.

8. Air Quality: Air quality in the region is generally good. The allotment is in a Class II area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality as defined in the federal Clean Air Act. Class II areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

9. Recreation: Since this allotment has no facility based recreational activities, only dispersed recreational opportunities occur on these lands. Recreational activities that occur include hunting, caving, sightseeing, Off Highway Vehicle Use, primitive camping, horseback riding and hiking.

Legal and physical access to public lands located in this allotment are through state lands and county maintained roads. Off Highway Vehicle designation for public lands within this allotment are classified as "Limited"

to existing roads and trails. The majority of public lands in this allotment can only be accessed by foot (hiking, or walking).

10. Cave/Karst: There are no known significant caves on this allotment. This area has a high potential for cave/karst features. There will be no further discussion of this resource.

11. Wetlands/Riparian: A spring is located on federal land in Sec. 14. The spring source is fenced. Water is available outside of the enclosure for livestock and wildlife. The riparian vegetation consists of rushes, sedges, and salt cedar. Riparian assessments were conducted in 1994 and 1997 by an interdisciplinary team and the spring was classified as being in Proper Functioning Condition.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils: Livestock remove the cover of standing vegetation and litter, and compact the soil by trampling. These effects can lead to reduced infiltration rates and increased runoff. Reduced vegetative cover and increased runoff can result in higher erosion rates and soil losses, making it more difficult to produce forage and to protect the soil from further erosion. These adverse effects can be greatly reduced by maintaining an adequate vegetative cover on the soil. Ongoing vegetation studies conducted on the allotment indicate that, at the level of grazing identified in the proposed action, the percent bare ground and rock found on the allotment fall within the parameters established by the RMP/EIS for this vegetative community. Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns are expected to retain sufficient vegetative cover on the allotment as a whole and this will maintain the stability of the soils. Soil compaction and excessive vegetative use will occur at small, localized areas such as drinking locations, along trails and at bedding areas. Positive affects from the proposed action include the speeding up of the nutrient cycling process and chipping of the soil crust by hoof action.

2. Vegetation: Vegetation will continue to be grazed and trampled by domestic livestock as well as other herbivores. The area has been grazed by livestock since the early part of the 1900's, if not longer. Ecological

condition and trend is expected to remain stable and/or improve over the long term at the permitted number of livestock. Vegetation monitoring indicates that there is an adequate amount of forage for the proposed number of livestock and for wildlife.

3. Wildlife: Wildlife will continue to compete with domestic livestock for forage and browse. Cover, and other habitat requirements for wildlife will remain the same as the existing situation. With proper utilization levels there will be adequate cover and forage for wildlife species; resulting in sustainable wildlife populations for those species that occupy the area. Maintenance and availability of existing waterings will continue to prove a dependable water source for wildlife, as well as livestock.

4 Livestock Management: Livestock would continue to be grazed under the same management system and the same numbers in accordance with the livestock use agreement signed in 1995. Actual livestock numbers may be less than the active use depending on vegetative and economic conditions. No adverse impacts are anticipated.

5. Visual Resources The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape, or the primary aspect of the vegetation within the allotment.

6. Water Quality -. The drainages on the allotment are ephemeral, so direct impacts to surface water quality would be minor, short-term impacts during stormflow. Indirect impacts to water-quality related resources, such as fisheries, would not occur. The proposed action would not have a significant effect on ground water. Livestock would be dispersed over the allotment, and the soil would filter potential contaminants. Livestock would not impact the spring since it is already fenced off.

7. Air Quality: Dust levels under the proposed action would be slightly higher than under the no grazing alternative due to allotment management activities. The levels would still be within the limits allowed in a Class II area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality.

8. Recreation: Grazing should have little or no impact on the dispersed recreational opportunities within this allotment, since the recreational use of these public lands are relatively low. The evidence or presence of livestock can negatively affect visitors who desire solitude, unspoiled

landscape views or hike without seeing signs of livestock. However, grazing can benefit some forms of recreation, such as hunting, by creating new water sources for game animals.

9. Wetlands/Riparian: Riparian vegetation associated with the spring is already protected with a fence enclosure. Livestock would not affect this resource.

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative.

1. Soils: . Soil compaction would be reduced on the allotment around old trails and drinking troughs and there would be a small reduction in soil loss on the allotment.

2. Vegetation: . It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same, however, there would be small changes in the relative percentages of these species. Vegetation will continue to be utilized by wildlife. There would be an increase in the amount of standing vegetation.

3. Wildlife: Wildlife would have no competition with livestock for forage and cover. There would be no maintenance of livestock waters. As these waters became inoperable, water availability could become a critical limiting factor for many wildlife species.

4. Livestock management: The forage from public land would be unavailable for use by the permittee. This would have a significant adverse economic impact to the livestock operation. The checkerboard land status on the allotment makes it economically unfeasible to fence out the federal land and use only the private land. It would become uneconomical for the permittee to continue agricultural production.

5. Visual Resources: There would be no change in the visual resources.

6. Water Quality: There could be a slight improvement in water quality due to the minor reductions in sediment loading during stormflow.

7. Air Quality: There would be a slightly less dust under this alternative versus the proposed alternative, but this would be negligible when considering all sources of dust.

8..Recreation: Those recreationists who desire solitude and no livestock would be benefitted from this alternative. Hunters may not benefit from this alternative if livestock waters are not maintained, which would affect hunting opportunities

9. Wetland/Riparian: There would be no difference between this alternative and the proposed alternative since the riparian area is already fenced.

V. Cumulative Impacts

All of the allotments that have permits/leases with the BLM will have to go through scoping and analysis under NEPA. This allotment is near allotments that will be undergoing this process. If the proposed action is selected, there would be no change in the cumulative impacts since it does not vary from the current situation.

If the no livestock grazing alternative is selected, there would be little change in the cumulative impact as long as the surrounding allotments continue to be stocked at their current level. If the permitted/leased numbers are reduced on the surrounding ranches as well, the economics of the surrounding communities and/or minority/low income populations would be negatively impacted.

The No Grazing alternative was considered, but not chosen in the Rangeland Reform Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Record of Decision (ROD) (p. 28). The elimination of grazing in the Roswell Field Office Area was also considered but eliminated by the Roswell RMP/ROD (pp. ROD-2).

VI. Residual Impacts

The area has been grazed by livestock since the early part of the 1900's, if not longer. Vegetative monitoring studies have shown that grazing, at the current permitted numbers of animals, is sustainable. If the mitigation measures are enacted, then there would be no residual impacts to the proposed action.

VII. Mitigating Measures

Vegetation monitoring studies will continue to be conducted and the permitted numbers of livestock will be adjusted if necessary. If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.

VIII. Fundamentals of Rangeland Health

The fundamentals of rangeland health are identified in 43 CFR §§4180.1 and pertain to watershed function, ecological processes, water quality, and habitat for threatened and endangered (T&E) species and other special status species. Based on the available data and professional judgement, the evaluation by this environmental assessment indicates that the conditions identified in the fundamentals of rangeland health exist on the allotment.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/RATIONALE

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined the **proposed action** will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Rationale for Recommendations: The proposed action would not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. The **proposed action** will be in compliance with the Roswell Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (October, 1997).

T. R. Kreager,
Acting Assistant Field Office Manager - Resources

Date